



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on South Ossetia

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires Kyle Scott
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
April 6, 2006

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, earlier when we were speaking of Moldova you noted the different perceptions of delegations with regard to the facts on the ground. That is why the United States so much values the work of our Missions in the field to provide this Organization with independent and reliable reports on what is taking place. So is the case with the March 31st spot report issued by the OSCE Mission in Georgia.

We have to register our concern about the report that the Monitoring Officers (MMOs) observed an illegal twin-barreled anti-aircraft gun in South Ossetia. Even though the MMOs told the Joint Peacekeeping Force (JPKF) of the violation, the JPKF, which was based only ten minutes away, took more than one hour to respond. During that hour, South Ossetians removed the illegal gun from the scene – all under the watchful eye of the MMOs.

This is the sixth such time that heavy equipment or weapons have been observed in or around Tskhinvali since last December. Moreover, as the spot report noted, the South Ossetian personnel were often aggressive and uncooperative, openly threatening the OSCE observers.

Mr. Chairman,

These kinds of provocations must stop. The South Ossetian authorities are showing a patent disregard for the Sochi and other agreements, which clearly state that there must be no heavy equipment in the zone of conflict. Furthermore, the behavior of the JPKF, as described in detail by the MMOs' report, was clearly unacceptable. The JPKF response to the incident casts considerable doubt on the ability, or willingness, of that force to act responsibly and impartially.

There can be no hope for a peaceful solution of the conflict with this kind of behavior. This is particularly unfortunate in light of last week's moderately successful JCC.

We are pleased with the positive developments that emerged from last week's meeting in Vladikavkaz. In particular, we welcome the various decisions taken:

- to form a working group on the peaceful settlement of the conflict based on Georgia's peace plan and the subsequent initiative by Mr. Kokoity late last year;
- to task a steering committee with drafting a priority-ordered list for the \$10 million of mutually agreed projects from the recently completed Needs Assessment Survey;
- to examine joint policing opportunities; and
- to hold the next JCC by the end of April.

We hope the JCC will move swiftly to complete these initiatives.

At the same time, Mr. Chairman, we regret that the Co-Chairs could not agree on a common position on confidence-building measures, security guarantees, and demilitarization. Georgia has unilaterally announced that it will start demilitarization measures, and we urge the South Ossetian authorities to adopt a similarly constructive approach. Specifically on confidence-building measures, we note that Georgia handed over a draft Law on Restitution for the Victims of the Georgian-Ossetian Conflict; we hope that the relevant JCC committee will provide thoughtful comments by its mid-April deadline in order to hasten the adoption and implementation of this important legislation.

On a related note, Mr. Chairman, we welcomed the announcement last Friday, March 31st, of signature of the agreement between Russia and Georgia on the withdrawal of Russian forces from Akhalkalaki and Batumi. This is an important step toward fulfillment of the remaining Istanbul Commitments, and it is welcome news. We hope that further progress is possible in the near term on the remaining commitments.

Summing up, Mr. Chairman, there have been some positive developments, but we cannot ignore the problems and call on the South Ossetian authorities to cease and desist such actions that ignore the Sochi and other agreements governing activities in the Zone of Conflict. Finally, we reiterate our call on the JPKF to fulfill its mandate in preventing such incidents.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.